

KINGS RIVER FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Joining together to improve the Kings River fisheries.

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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KINGS RIVER AGENCIES WILL WATCH CLOSELY AS HIGHER MINIMUM FISHERY FLOWS TAKE EFFECT

Higher late fall and winter minimum Kings River fishery flows, anticipated under a six-year-old innovative environmental program are about to become reality. These additional flows will be monitored closely by agencies and anglers who have worked hand in hand to improve fishery conditions downstream from Pine Flat Dam.

Under agreements that implemented the landmark Kings River Fisheries Management Program in May 1999, Kings River Water Association (KRWA) member agencies will soon begin voluntarily making available minimum fishery releases of 250 cubic feet per second (c.f.s.). The higher-than-usual minimum releases are expected to begin about November 1 when this year's irrigation demands are currently scheduled to largely end. While not required under the Program documents, the higher flows were set as a goal to be triggered by high runoff years. The KRWA and its members will provide those flows this year.

"These flows will continue over the winter months between Pine Flat Dam and Fresno Weir," Kings River Watermaster and Fisheries Management Program Executive Director Steven Haugen said. The weir, nine miles downstream from Pine Flat Dam, marks the head-works of two large canal systems. Haugen said flows over Fresno Weir and into the lower Kings River that are called for in the program's agreements will continue to be made as in previous years.

KRWA, the Kings River Conservation District (KRCD), California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) and the Kings River Fisheries Management Program's Public Advisory Group (PAG) began planning for the higher fall flows last winter. The three agencies are the Fisheries Management Program's formal partners but the PAG has emerged as a valued collaborator. "We knew by late last winter from the big snowpack and above-average runoff forecasts that we would reach the Fisheries Management Program threshold under which the goal of 250 c.f.s. minimum flows would be triggered," said Haugen.

William Loudermilk, the CDFG's Central California manager in Fresno, pointed out that the above-average water conditions were the first since the Fisheries Management Program was established.

"Since 1999, Kings River water users have been making available minimum releases of

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100 c.f.s.," Loudermilk said. "That is twice what was provided under a 1964 agreement between our agency and KRWA. Cooperating to provide this additional water and working so diligently to improve the fishery are what has made the Kings River program such a great model."

Haugen said KRWA, KRCD, CDFG and the PAG are anxious to gather as much knowledge and data as possible about fishery habitat expanded by the flows, as well as fish behavior.

The Fisheries Management Program has stepped up monitoring along with construction and development of fishery habitat improvements. Work this fall and winter will include a significant amount of boulder and spawning gravel placement along with other improvements. Other activities include improved fishing access, supplemental trout stocking, enhanced enforcement of existing fish and game regulations, consideration of new regulations, public awareness and education activities, and creation of a monitoring program to determine effects of various program elements.

Cooperation, consensus and program implementation are at the heart of the Kings River Fisheries Management Program. The 28 KRWA member agencies voluntarily provided 12% of their storage rights to establish the program's 100,000 acre-foot temperature control pool along with providing the increased minimum releases.

The program's first major project was creation of the Thorburn Spawning Channel near the foothill town of Piedra and Winton Park in 2000. The half-mile long meandering channel makes it possible for trout to spawn and grow under controlled conditions that have the riparian look and function of a natural stream while enjoying shelter from the river's high and swift flows. The program also supported the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in its development of a turbine bypass piping system at Pine Flat Dam that now greatly aids in managing temperatures of water being released through the dam into the river during low-flow and low-storage periods.

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